

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001229

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/22/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: MARCH 19 RALLY ATTACKS CHEN, SOONG, AND MA

REF: TAIPEI 01187

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D)

1. (C) Summary: The KMT's March 19 rally was more significant for the drama behind the scenes than what unfolded on stage. Although originally organized to protest the DPP government's handling of last year's election eve shooting of President Chen and VP Lu, the rally deteriorated into a pair of mudslinging matches between People First Party (PFP) Chairman James Soong and the KMT on one hand, and between Legislative Yuan (LY) President Wang Jin-pyng and Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou on the other hand. KMT Chairman Lien Chan used the rally to call for a second commission to investigate the March 19, 2004 shooting and blamed the DPP government's pro-independence activities for increasing cross-Strait tensions and for inciting Beijing to enact the Anti-Secession Law. Although the KMT announced it would mobilize 100,000 participants, Taiwan police estimated that only around 20,000 attended the parade and rally. End Summary.

Self-Inflicted Wounds

2. (SBU) The KMT had originally organized the March 19 parade and rally to protest the DPP government's investigation of last year's election eve shooting of President Chen Shui-bian and VP Annette Lu in Tainan. The rally itself, however, was overshadowed by the media focus on the PRC Anti-Secession Law and on intra-Pan-Blue rivalries. Moreover, the media image of the rally was of a pair of mudslinging matches between People First Party (PFP) Chairman James Soong and the KMT on one hand, and between Legislative Yuan (LY) President Wang Jin-pyng and Taipei City Mayor Ma Ying-jeou on the other hand.

Conspicuous Absence and Presence

3. (C) Many of the participants interviewed by the media during the March 19 rally focused their wrath more on James Soong's absence from the protest than Chen Shui-bian's presence in the Presidential Office. Although Soong decided to stay away from the March 19 rally, a sizable number of PFP legislators marched with the demonstrators. PFP Policy Chief and Legislator Vincent Chang (Hsien-yao) both publicly and privately dismissed media reports that Soong had instructed PFP members to avoid the rally. Chang told AIT that there were no such orders and that PFP members were free to attend the rally as individuals. At least ten PFP legislators, including Chou Hsi-wei, Lee Yong-ping, Sun Ta-chien, Lee Ching-hua, and Chiu Yi, were present at the march and rally. (Comment: This would fit Soong's SOP. He usually will not get involved in a fight he cannot win. In this case, it was clear that some PFP members would march regardless of what Soong said. Given that, Soong most likely refrained from issuing futile instructions. End Comment)

4. (SBU) While Lien Chan spoke of unity within the Pan-Blue camp, New Party Chairman Yok Mu-ming told the crowd to "forget about the people who have left and support those who are united." Several leading PFP politicians publicly criticized their Chairman for failing to show. During the rally, an elderly member of the Concentric Patriotism Association of the Republic of China suddenly ran to the front of the crowd and pulled out a knife in an apparent attempt to commit ritual suicide by gutting himself. After he was forcibly halted, the protester told reporters that he wanted to express his discontent with Soong for betraying the Pan-Blue alliance by his joint statement with Chen.

Turning the Guns on Ma

5. (C) In the lead-up to March 19, Soong attempted to deflect criticism by blaming Ma for the Pan-Blue defeat in the 2004 presidential race. Soong told the media that it was Ma who advised canceling all campaign rallies on the eve of the election after the shooting took place. At the March 19 rally, Wang Jin-pyng repeated Soong's insinuations against Ma by stating that it was a mistake for the KMT to have canceled the rallies that were scheduled to take place on the night of the shooting. Wang said that the rallies would have boosted the morale of the Pan-Blue supporters. "By canceling the

rallies," he continued, "the media focused instead on the shooting, distracted the public, and consequently, Lien and Soong lost the election." PFP Legislator Hwang Yih-jiau told AIT that Soong blames Ma for more than just canceling the election eve rallies. Hwang said that many Pan-Blue insiders now believe that Ma deliberately sabotaged the entire Lien-Soong presidential campaign effort to advance his own presidential ambitions.

Meanwhile, Back at the Rally

16. (C) The March 19 rally itself was far smaller than organizers had promised. KMT Organizational Development Chairman Liao Fung-te had told AIT that the party planned to mobilize 50,000 Pan-Blue supporters. In an effort to increase turnout, the KMT later announced it expected 100,000 to attend. Initially, broadcast media reported a turnout of 300,000 and Wang Jin-pyng claimed to AIT a turnout of 150,000. Taiwan police, however, estimated the number of participants at 20,000. KMT/New Party Legislator Joanna Lei (Chien) told AIT that the rally was largely a New Party effort. She said that weeks prior to March 19 she was shocked to learn that the KMT headquarters had nothing planned. Lei said that she and her New Party colleagues provided behind-the-scene guidance and support, and asked the KMT to provide funding and resources. She also remarked that New Party members merely wanted to see action and results, and that in the future they will gladly provide backstage support but allow the KMT organization to take the credit.

17. (SBU) In his speech to the crowd in what was billed as the "March 19 Democracy, Peace, and Truth" rally, KMT Chairman Lien Chan pledged that "the search for truth will not stop until the truth is found," and urged opposition lawmakers to rush through legislation to create a second March 19 Truth Investigation Committee. Lien also blamed the DPP's pro-independence activities for the worsening of cross-Straits relations, saying that "as long as we do not declare Taiwan independence, China will not attack Taiwan." Wang Jin-pyng and Ma Ying-jeou echoed Lien's call for a second investigation committee and for peaceful cross-Straits relations. Criticizing President Chen for threatening cross-Straits peace, Ma claimed that China passed the Anti-Secession Law because of the DPP government's plans to deviate from the Republic of China Constitution and Chen's failure to abide by his "four noes" pledge.

18. (SBU) Speaking in Tainan on the same day, President Chen offered to discuss the creation of a "constitutionally consistent" March 19 investigation commission, and suggested that Lien Chan and James Soong co-chair the commission.

Comment: Stage Directions

19. (C) The KMT's March 19 rally was more significant for the political backbiting that took place on its margins than what unfolded on stage. Just as the KMT had allowed its coalition partner PFP to drive policy in the heyday of their alliance, the KMT now permits the New Party faction (four legislators and a handful of party members) to act as the engine of the rump Pan-Blue alliance. Playing to the crowd, Ma and Wang each stood by Lien's side and reiterated Lien's message in an attempt to cast himself as his preferred heir apparent. The absence of Soong and the presence of a significant number of his PFP colleagues at the rally suggest that there may be more "Pan-Blue" unity than PFP unity (Septel).

PAAL